THE BARAKAT GALLERY

Chinese Art

Neolithic Era
10000 BC - 2000 BC

Neolithic Era

Neolithic Marble Sculpture

H.045
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 2050 BC
Dimensions:
10.75" (27.3cm) high x 5.5" (14.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Marble
Location: United States

Carved in a hard stone, this figure is modelled raising its arms to its chest, perhaps holding an offering or performing a symbolic gesture of humbleness. The image appears to be sculpted from the original shape of the stone, its elongated head rounded at the tip and its stout body flushed at the base. Incised lines extending from the forehead represent hair, while the facial features are delicately carved forming wide eyes and brow line, long nose and traces of a closed mouth. The transition from a nomadic, hunting existence to one of farming before the use of metals marks the beginning of the Neolithic period which began around 7000 B.C. in China. The peoples of different settlements can be identified and understood through such artifacts as pottery, tools, and architectural remains. This unique stone carving of a figure probably served part of the religious belief system that became incorporated into the practice of burying the dead and propitiating supernatural forces. During this period, human figurines bore curious, self confident expressions and appeared in anthropomorphized forms. Geometric patterns and fish designs also characterize Neolithic period artifacts. - (H.045)

Marble Figure

H.510
Origin: China
Circa: 3300 BC to 2050 BC
Dimensions:
15.5" (39.4cm) high x 5.5" (14.0cm) wide

Catalogue: V17
Collection: Chinese
Medium: Marble
Location: Great Britain

Song Granite Sculpture of a Celestial Guardian

H.512
Origin: China
Circa: 3300 BC to 2050 BC
Dimensions:
15" (38.1cm) high x 5.5" (14.0cm) wide

Catalogue: V17
Collection: Chinese
Medium: Marble
Location: Great Britain

This piece is a masterpiece from a highly inscrutable time and place – Neolithic China. While the dynastic periods are comparatively well studied and understood, the nature and relationships of the early societies living in agricultural communities between 4000 and 2000 BC are still somewhat nebulous. Even the geography was different. When this piece was made, it was much wetter, with most of Northern China being swamps and marshes, and much of the central area covered in an enormous lake. The climate was warm and moist, rather than the colder, arid China of today. The mountains were well forested and there was a variety of animals. Villages were small and arranged around prime agricultural areas; village structure was based along kinship lines. Most artistic expression was achieved through ceramics, which were often highly ornate and painted. Comparatively little is known of religion, but there are some hints in the iconography of the ceramics. For instance, the 5th millennium BC site of Banpo (near Xi'an) has produced ceramics with fantastical animals, including, significantly, fish with human faces/ masks. These are unlikely to have been a completely secular creation. The oldest religions of East Asia – and indeed the world – are based around a form of animism that bestows spiritual characteristics upon natural phenomena, from mountains to weather systems, and economic staples have enjoyed similar reverence in other parts of the world. It has been theorised that the Banpo people, who lived in a riverine environment, may have revered fish as their main food source and expressed this on their ceramics. It has further been suggested that they even based some form of belief system around fish – perhaps with a magically-trained individual to perform ceremonies that guaranteed prosperity in the forthcoming season, although this is necessarily speculative. Numerous subsequent and contemporary cultures possessed animal effigies, and it has generally been assumed that – due to the expertise and time required to produce them – they must have formed part of some belief system that transcended mere secular diversion. One might speculate that the effort involved in stone carving would exceed that of pottery making, and there is collateral evidence for this in the jade works of the Liangzhu culture (Yangzi delta, 3300-2300 BC), which were almost all zoomorphically decorated works in evidently elite graves (amulets, ornaments, necklaces etc).

The rarity of works such as the current piece argues against personalised ownership, and instead for a wider audience within a substantial community. The identity of the creature portrayed is deliberately ambiguous, as it has a clearly humanoid head with slanted coffee-bean eyes (a marker of extreme antiquity in every continent), a small raised nose connected to the brows, and a small pursed mouth. The surface of the head is covered with indented linear marks possibly indicating hair, while the most forward-pointing part of the piece is what appears to be an ear. This might be challenged on the basis of the rest of the piece, as it has hatching that could be interpreted equally as feathers or fish- scales, making the "ear" a beak or protuberant mouth. The flat side of the piece has elevated sections that could be seen as a tail (if a fish) or furled wings (if a bird). Significantly, the piece has an unadorned back and a plain base, so it was clearly meant to be seen only from the front, or from above. It might then have been mounted into an altar, or been a decorative finial in some other structure made of earth or similar. The texture of the surface indicates that it was worked at using abrasion and small hand tools, so the quantity of work involved must have been immense. Whether a deity of a spirit, this is a truly significant and important masterwork, and an invaluable addition to any serious collection. - (H.510) - (H.512)

Many thousands of years ago, our earliest ancestors were nomadic tribes that survived by foraging the wild for food and shelter. During the Neolithic era, human groups first began to settle down permanently, establishing villages and communities. However, without new technological innovations, this sedentary culture would not have been possible. Foremost among these discoveries were agriculture and tool-making, both of which enabled humans to transform their natural environment into a sustainable society. Many thousands of years ago, the area presently covered by modern China was made up of distinct regions each with their own unique cultural identity. Archaeologists have been able to discern some of these cultures from each other based upon the burial styles, architecture, and pottery, perhaps the most immediate remnant of this age.

When Neolithic mankind began to settle in areas further removed from sources of water, transportation of this vital fluid became a foremost necessity. After unsuccessful attempts to create water resistant vessel from wicker baskets caked in mud, pottery was invented. The creation of pottery in China dates back as early as 6000 B.C. when villagers first realized that the earth around fires became hard and impervious to liquid. From this realization came the birth of pottery, fulfilling the practical necessity of water transportation and allowing civilization to expand. While pottery was created to answer a need, it soon progressed to be more than functional: it was also beautiful. While Neolithic vessels would have been used to carry water or to store grains, they are also spectacular artistic creations. The forms of the vessels, built up from coiled clay, are elegant and refined.

The generic name for the Neolithic culture that created these vessels is Yangshao (3000-1500 B.C.). They are thought to have been the first to harvest silk from the silkworm, initiating a tradition the Chinese are still famous for today. While few specifics are known about the Yangshao culture, information gathered from archaeological excavations of tombs and tribal villages has provided a rudimentary vision of life in prehistoric China. Furthermore, the geometric paintings that decorate Neolithic vessels represent some of the earliest evidence of the origins and evolution of calligraphic writing in China. While these designs are purely abstract and in no way constitute a written language, the patterns, motifs, and application of paint all serve to give us insight into the intellectual and aesthetic atmosphere that would eventually foster the creation of Chinese symbols.

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.613
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 10" (25.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.616
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 6.5" (16.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

The decoration of this vessel is rather simplistic. The short neck has been embellished by a serrated motif painted in black. Concentric rings mark the interior of the rim. Two lug handles connect the rim of the lip to the join of the neck and shoulder and would have facilitated the transportation of goods once contained within. The handles have been adorned as well with a series of horizontal black lines. The majority of the body has been covered in paint while the lower portion remains unfinished (a characteristic of the Neolithic style). A thick band wraps around the shoulders. Save for a motif of large "X" shapes rendered in reserve, the band is almost solid black. This pattern is only interrupted in the spaces underneath the handle where a black hourglass-shaped form stands out against two reserve triangles. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.613) - (H.616)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.618
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 10" (25.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Style: Yangshao
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

This vessel is especially noteworthy for the reserved simplicity of the decoration. Generally, Yangshao works are elaborately embellished with complex abstract and geometric motifs. However, this vessel reveals the altruism that sometimes less is more. The decoration, kept to a minimum of simple lines and bands, conforms to the shape of the vessel itself. A burgundy band highlighted with three parallel black zigzags demarcates the flaring top-half of the neck while a similar band emphasizes the join of the sloping shoulder and the body. Perhaps the most charming (and significant) feature of this vase is the row of simplified birds that mark along the shoulder just above the burgundy bank. Such abstracted designs provide a useful reference when studying the origins of calligraphic writing in China. Columns of three parallel black lines adorn the length of the body. As well, two small lug hands are attached to the body just below the shoulder and would have facilitated the transportation of goods once contained within. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.618)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.620
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 5.25" (13.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. Groups of parallel lines swirl together in a diamond-shaped pattern along the main central band. A motif of diagonal grids fills the voids between the diamond patterns. Thick bands with serrated edges fill the voids leading up to the neck while the grid motif is reiterated along the exterior of the neck. Two small lug handles connect the rim of the lip to the join of the neck and shoulders. A simple black "X" embellishes these handles. Even the upper interior of the neck has been adorned by a thick burgundy band with black scalloped edges. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.620)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.615
Origin: China
Circa: 5000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 15.5" (39.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

The gently sloping shoulder of this large vessel has been embellished with a pattern of swirling spirals painted in burgundy and black. A circular band at the base of the neck frames the top while an undulating line below the spirals serves as a transition into the unadorned lower half of the body. The neck itself has also been adorned with a diagonal grid pattern covering the top half and a scalloped motif along the bottom. Both halves are divided by a thick black band. Two small lug handles attached to the swelling join of the shoulder and the body facilitate transportation of the grains of foods once contained within. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today is it appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.615)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.619
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 16" (40.6cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

The arching shoulder of this large vessel has been embellished with a sophisticated pattern of cross-shaped and circular motifs painted in burgundy and black. Small reserved squares are arranged in a cruciform pattern, each square in turn highlighted with a cross and four dots filling the divided segments. This motif, painted in black and framed in a burgundy circle, is repeated four times across the body of the vessel. More black circles radiated concentrically outward like the echoes of a sound. The short, flaring neck is embellished with black chevrons on the outside and, on the inside, with a burgundy band and black double arches. Two small handles attached to the swelling join of the shoulder and the body facilitate transportation of the grains of foods once contained within. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.619)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.617
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 10.25" (26.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

This vessel rests upon a flaring base highlighted by a series of punctured holes. These holes are framed with painted black circles that are in turn each connected by a grid of diagonal lines. While the lower half of the body is left unadorned, the upper portion has been embellished with an intricate motif. Pyriform shapes (recalling the form of the vessel itself) framed in red and filled with a diagonal grid pattern are repeated four times. The spaces in between are covered with undulating vertical black lines. The short, flaring lip has been decorated with a series of black chevron on the exterior and arching black and burgundy lines on the interior. Two small lug handles (emphasized with horizontal black lines) connect the rim of the flaring lip to the top of the shoulders and facilitate the transportation of the goods once contained within. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.617)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.775
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 16.75" (42.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. Alternating bands of red and black interspersed with rings filled with miniatures black triangles produces a pattern that is as rhythmic as it is beautiful. The small triangles are painted in close proximity stacked on top of each other that creates a feast for the eyes when viewed from afar. While the decoration of the body is fairly complex and intricate, the neck is adorned with a simple diagonal grid. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.775)

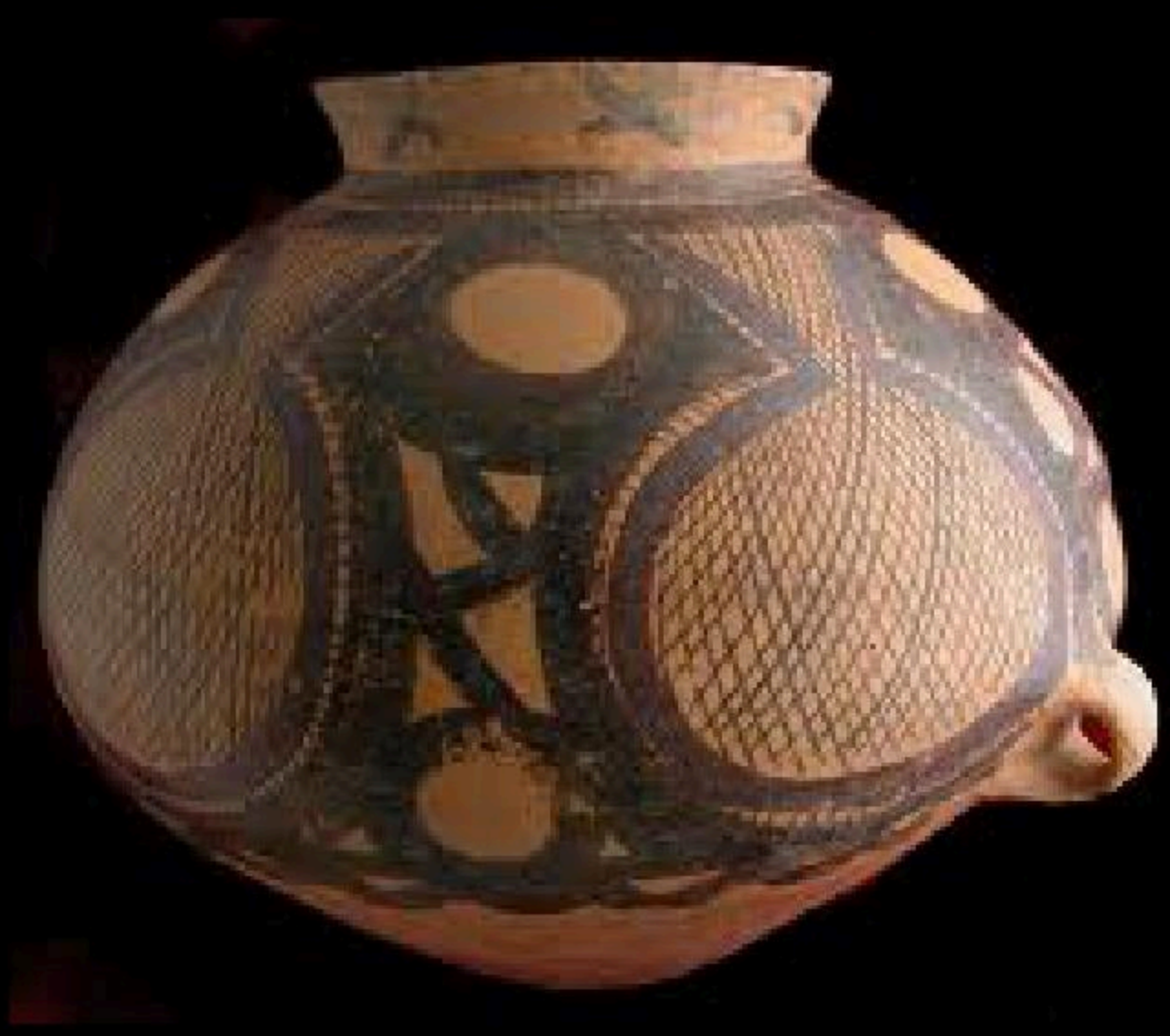
Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.776
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 11.75" (29.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Style: Yangshao
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. Inverted horseshoe patterns painted in red are filled with black diagonal grids. The space between the "horseshoes" is adorned with a diagonal checkerboard motif. The neck of the vessel, covered in a diagonal grid, picks up on the motifs of the body. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.776)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel



H.777
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 14" (35.6cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. The main motif of this vessel features an inverted omega-shaped design rendered in red paint and filled with a diagonal black grid. This motif is repeated across the upper body of the vessel. The space in between is painted black and features various circles and zig-zag patterns. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.777)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.779
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 14.75" (37.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. Alternating bands of red and black interspersed with rings filled with miniatures black triangles produces a pattern that is as rhythmic as it is beautiful. The small triangles are painted in close proximity stacked on top of each other that creates a feast for the eyes when viewed from afar. While the decoration of the body is fairly complex and intricate, the neck is adorned with a simple diagonal grid. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.779)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.800
Origin: China
Circa: 5000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 12.75" (32.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. A red circle is divided by a row of dots. Concentric circles of black radiate outward from the central motif that is repeated across shoulders. A chevron pattern decorates the flaring neck. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.800)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.801
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 16.25" (41.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. Painted in red and black, a pattern of swirling lines surround circles filled with a diamond checkerboard motif. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.801)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.803
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 12.25" (31.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. The pattern of red and black diamond motifs fills the upper shoulder of this vessel. Simple “x” shapes decorate the exterior of the gently flaring lip while alternating vertical lines and arches mark the interior. A marvelously textured encrustation has cemented itself to the lower half of the body, a testament to its age. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.803)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.804
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 13.75" (34.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. The central motif of this vessel is a red circle filled with a tic-tac-toe shaped grid. Four black circles are arranged in four squares, forming a cross shape with the other sections are filled with a grid pattern. Black concentric circles radiate outward from this design that is repeated across the upper shoulders of the vessel. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.804)

Neolithic Terracotta Vessel

H.880
Origin: China
Circa: 5000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 13" (33.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

Neolithic Terracotta Vessel

H.881
Origin: China
Circa: 5000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 10" (25.4cm) high

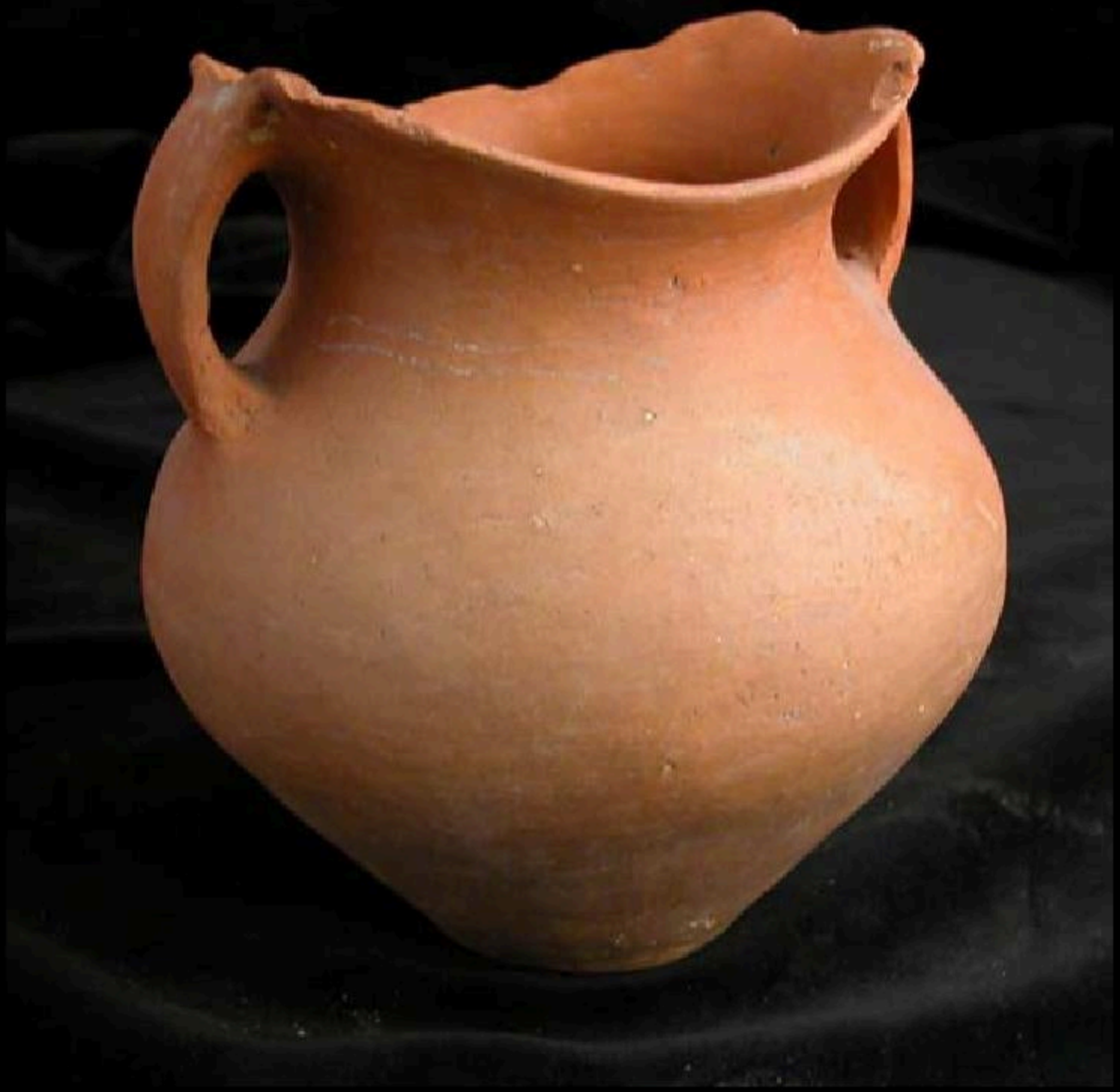
Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

Neolithic Terracotta Vessel

H.882
Origin: China
Circa: 5000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 7" (17.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

Neolithic Terracotta Vessel



H.883
Origin: China
Circa: 5000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 5.5" (14.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

Neolithic Terracotta Vessel

H.884
Origin: China
Circa: 5000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 5.25" (13.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

While pottery was created to answer a need, it soon progressed to be more than functional: it was also beautiful. While this large, unadorned Neolithic vessel would have been used to carry water or other precious liquids, it is also the creation of an artist with a trained eye. The form of the work, built up from coiled clay, is elegant and refined. The gentle curves of the belly slope upwards into a wide neck and flaring concave rim. A rope would have once been inserted through the two handles, facilitating transportation. While other Neolithic vessels are covered in painted geometric patterns, this pot is left unadorned, allowing the orange hue of the earthenware to speak for itself. Furthermore, the lack of decoration focuses out attention of the form of the vessel. From this simple pot and others like it began the great tradition of ceramics in China, an art form that this country would become famous for. - (H.880) - (H.881) - (H.882) - (H.883) - (H.884)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

H.1053
Origin: China
Circa: 3500 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions: 18" (45.7cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. Simple “x” shapes decorate the exterior of the gently flaring neck while arches mark the interior of the lip. The shoulders of the vessel are by an unusual pattern consisting of a circle filled with a grid motif surrounded by vertical and diagonal lines. The diagonal lines emerge from the vertical as if the arms and legs of a stick figure. This association is reinforced by the addition of tassels that almost look like fingers and toes. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.1053)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

lo.1246
Origin: China
Circa: 2500 BC to 2000 BC
Dimensions: 15" (38.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel

FF.059
Origin: China
Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC
Dimensions:
13.1" (33.3cm) high x 13.5" (34.3cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

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